

Volume 31
May 1991
NUMBER 5

Published monthly by
Fultondale Church of
Christ Meeting at
2005 Elkwood Drive,
Fultondale, AL 35068

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.,
Editor

Address

POSTMASTER AND
READERS : Send all
correspondence and
forms to **The Reflector**,
3004 Brakefield Drive,
Fultondale, AL 35068

Services

Sundays:
Classes 9:45 a.m.
Worship 10:45 a.m.
Worship 6:00 p.m.
Wednesdays:
Class 10:00 a.m.
Classes 7:30 p.m.

Meeting

David Hartselle
Dec. 1-6, 1991

USPS 606-140
Second Class Postage Paid
At Fultondale, AL 35068

FROM FULTONDALE CHURCH OF CHRIST...

The Reflector

Divine Incentives

By EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR.

WHY do people wilfully persist in sin after being taught what the Bible says about sin? Why do they not obey gospel after learning what the Bible teaches? Why do brethren wilfully neglect assembly and worship? Why do they persist in things they know the Bible does not authorize or condone? Why do they live a daily life that they know to be sinful? Why are so many Christians drifting along in half-hearted service to God?

We may not know all the reasons behind such behavior, but it seems to us that it is because the incentive to sin is stronger with them than the incentive not to sin. The immediate pleasure and temporal rewards of sin are stronger than what the Bible teaches. Romans, chapter 2, refers to three divine incentives for us to do right — yet many evidently do not really believe them. Until one is convinced of the truth of these things, all the motivational hype in the world will not move him to genuinely change his course.

The Judgement Of God.

“But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?” (verses 2,3).

The Bible teaches that death and the judgement that follows could come upon us at any moment (Heb. 9:27; Jas. 4:13-17). Even death should not overtake us, Jesus could return in judgment at any time. (2 Pet. 3:1-15)

It is hard for me to see how one could wilfully put off obedience to the Lord, if he really believed that he might have to face the Great Judge today. Do you think one would wilfully engage in sinful practices, if he really thought the Lord could

come while engaged? How could one wilfully neglect any duty to God, if he thought judgment could be immediate?

The Goodness of God.

“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Rom 2:4).

How can we continue a life of sin when we consider God's goodness toward us—past, present, and future? He made us in his image. He has sustained us with life itself. God sent his Son into the world and sacrificed Him for us (Rom. 5:6-8). He has been longsuffering of us, allowing us time and opportunity to get right with Him. He promises eternal life in heaven to the faithful (Rev. 2:10; 21:22-22:5). How can we despise such goodness by continuing to selfishly live for ourselves, rather than for Him?

The Wrath Of God.

“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,...but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness— indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek” (verse 5,8,9).

Oh, how we like to think of the goodness of God. As good as God is, he is also a God of wrath. If knowing His goodness will not move us to repentance, surely a knowledge of his wrath will. The Bible teaches that there is a real place called hell. (Mark 9:42-48; Rev. 14:10-11; 21:8). Do we really believe it? Do we believe that those who obey not the gospel will go there? (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Do we really believe that “fiery indigna-

tion" awaits those who persist in sin (Heb. 10:26-29). If so, would we not avoid sin? If so, would we not live better? If so, would we not be better Christians, husbands, wives, neighbors, etc.?

Let's face it, people do not believe in these divine incentives strongly enough or they would do better. In the church, we spend too much time and effort trying to find ways to motivate people to do better by means other than the Lord's incentives. The Lord's incentives are balanced with both goodness and severity — love and wrath. We need to spend more time teaching what the Bible says about these things. When one comes to really believe what the Bible says about the judgment, goodness and wrath of God, he will be moved to do better.

For Parents Only

THINKING that three hours in any movie are harmless for the child, but that two hours of Bible study and Worship are too much for his nervous system is just bad thinking.

GIVING him a quarter for the collection and two dollars for a movie not only shows a parent's sense of value, but is also not likely to produce a giver.

LETTING him watch and listen to several hours of TV thrillers a day with no time for one short prayer or a few Bible verses is criminal unbalance.

BEING careful that Junior has his weekday lessons, caring not that he knows his Sunday lesson makes for spiritual illiteracy.

SAYING that a Child must make his own decisions as to whether or not he should go to church, or as to what church, is shirking parental responsibility.

WHEN FATHER spends Sunday morning in mowing the lawn, cleaning the garden., or playing golf, his sons are left to walk alone.

WHEN PARENTS idle away Sunday morning in reading the paper or listening to the radio or TV while brother and sister are sent by themselves to church, something happens to the children's evaluation of church attendance.

— Selected & Adapted

"Do Not Let The Church Be Burdened"

By EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR.

If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows." — 1 Tim. 5:16.

The last half of the twentieth century has been a period of unprecedented changes in man's thinking — technologically, sociologically, and even philosophically. This atomic-space age has brought with it an accelerated life-style that would have completely overwhelmed our great grandparents. Things that our children take for granted were science-fiction when many of us were children. Things that we now include in our basic cost of living budgets could not have been enjoyed by the world's wealthy only a few decades ago.

With all of this progress, maybe partly because of it, centuries-old values are being questioned, restructured or abandoned. New pressures have come to bear upon "traditional"

family values and structure, producing drastic changes. These changes have spilled over into society at large, giving rise to unprecedented social problems for families, communities and nations.

"Let the church do it", is the modern answer to many of those community and family needs and problems. It is taken for granted that churches have funds and staff for nearly every purpose under heaven. The communications media constantly urge people to turn to the church in every crisis.

If one comes up short on his rent or utilities or groceries — get the yellow pages and call the churches for help. If one has domestic, physical, or psychological problems — call on the church for help. If one needs a recreational diversion from the stresses of modern living — look to the church to provide it. If one needs his children cared for and/or educated — let the church do it. If one has problems with his children — look to the church to

straighten them out.

This kind of thinking has been the growing concept since World War II. The focus of church activity has gradually shifted away from meeting man's need for redemption from sin, building him up in the faith, fortifying him against sin and building within him a hope of a "better country" in heaven. Churches are now catering to man's every whim, need, and problem in matters that have primarily to do with his fleshly and temporal welfare rather than his eternal well being. With many churches, the list of "ministers" and "ministries" continually grows along with the budgets and facilities to support them — all with the idea of ministering to the "whole man." It seems almost silly to most people to question the scriptural basis for the activities and focus of such churches. Even in those churches that do not openly offer those "social gospel" oriented ministries, the men they supposedly support as full-time preachers are, in

fact, expected to provide all the same social gospel services.

New Testament congregations were primarily gospel teaching/preaching and worshipping bodies with a limited role in benevolence. The emphasis on teaching is seen from "offices" in the church. (Eph. 4:11-16). Teaching/preaching the gospel to the world at large in order to save it from sin and to the saints in order to build them up in the faith and to keep them from falling was the focus of the New Testament church. In benevolence, the New Testament churches limited their relief efforts to indigent saints. The church was not a general welfare agency.

The church can and should teach all the Bible says about every phase of a person's life — without taking over and functioning in those areas. It can teach what the Bible says about a good marriage without getting into the marriage counseling or brokerage business. It can teach what the Bible says about sexual behavior, without getting into the sex education business. It can teach what the Bible says about good business practices or employee-employer relations without trying to become a better business bureau or labor-relations board. It can teach what the Bible says about family relationships without becoming a family life center. It can teach that "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov 14:34), without trying to turn the church into a political action committee. It can teach younger women to be homemakers (Tit. 2:5) without setting up classes in washing, ironing, cooking, sewing or home management. It can teach what the Bible teaches on money matters without setting up a department of financial services.

We need to understand that because the church should teach the Bible in certain areas of personal responsibility, it does not give it the duty nor right to operate in all those areas. In those areas, we need to individually shoulder responsibility and say "let not the church be burdened."

1. Do not let the church be burdened with your needy relatives. (1 Tim. 5:16). If you have family members who are in need, the responsibility

for their care lies with you and not the church. (1 Tim. 5:8). Honoring your father and mother involves more than merely showing proper respect,

it involves meeting their financial needs (Matt. 15:4-6). It may mean that you will have to sacrifice some to do so, but it is still your responsibility.

The Gospel Plan Of Salvation

Hear

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."
(Rom 10:17 NKJ)

Faith

"Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." (John 8:24 NKJ)

"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.'" (Mark 16:15-16 NKJ)

Repentance

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent," (Acts 17:30 NKJ)

"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:38 NKJ)

Confession

"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. 10:9-10 NKJ)

Baptism

"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:38 NKJ)

"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16 NKJ)

"There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ," (1 Peter 3:21 NKJ)

One ought to be ashamed to ask the church to help his needy close relatives when he has the means of doing so.

2. Do not let the church be burdened with your poor neighbors. New Testament churches cared only for saints. The church at Jerusalem supported certain of their widows — who were saints. (Acts 6:1-6). The church at Antioch sent financial aid to the poor saints in Judea. (Acts 11:27-30). The churches of Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia helped poor saints in Jerusalem. (Rom. 15:25-28; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9).

New Testament Christians, individually, were taught to care for all according to ability and opportunity. (Gal. 6:10; Jas. 1:27) We as Christians have a wide range of responsibility in caring for our neighbors (Matt. 25:34-46). We need to do it and let not the church be burdened.

3. Do not let the church be burdened with the social life of your family and community. Where is the Bible authority for the church to provide entertainment, social functions, or recreational activities for its members or otherwise? Such activities belong in the "at home" area. (cf. 1 Cor. 11:22,34). Those activities are an important part of one's life and that of his family. However, it is an area that belongs to the home and not the church.

4. Do not let the church be burdened with rearing your children. The church can and should provide Bible teaching for people of all ages and relationships. The church must preach/teach the gospel (1 Tim. 3:15; Phil. 4:15,16). The gospel is for every creature — including your child. (Mk. 16:15,16). Preaching includes rebuking, reproving, exhorting — including your child (2 Tim. 4:1-4; Eph. 6:1). The church spiritually edifies and disciplines its members — including those who may be your children. The church owes no more or less attention in these things to your child (teen-age or otherwise) than it does to you or any other member of any chronological age.

God has made *parents*, not the church, responsible for rearing children: "And you, fathers, do not pro-

voke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Thus, as parents, we have the responsibility for the physical, mental, emotional, social, economic and spiritual development of our children.

This involves providing the means for development in all of these areas. It includes teaching them God's will (cf. Duet. 6:7; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15) It includes child discipline and behavioral training — even how to behave in church. It involves providing a wholesome environment with proper associations. While the church may supplement the parents' efforts in those areas where the church can scripturally function, it is still primarily the responsibility of parents.

It is disturbing to see parents expecting more and more from the church in providing those things for their children that they ought to provide. It is likewise disturbing to see churches who are more and more willing to assume the responsibility for providing those things necessary for the proper development of young people that should rest with the parents.

We have even known of churches to encourage parents to bring their children, with their problems, to them and back off and let the church and/or the preacher take care of the matter. My friend, even in those areas where the church may legitimately function

Omnipotence

A Bible class teacher was examining her pupils after a series of lessons on God's omnipotence. She asked, "Is there anything God can't do?"

There was silence. Finally, one lad held up his hand. The teacher, disappointed that the lesson's point had been missed, asked resigningly, "Well, just what is it that God can't do?"

"Well," replied the boy, "He can't please everybody."

— Selected



in supplementing your efforts to bring up your child in the "training and admonition of the Lord", you need to be directly involved. Your child's training is your responsibility and not the church's. Do not surrender that responsibility, nor allow it to be taken from you by the church, the preacher, or anyone else. Enlist any good outside help you can — but remember to let that help *supplement* your effort and not be a *substitute* for it. The rearing of children, even teens, is a home responsibility and not a church work.

It is sad that a lot of churches bring in a preacher to preach the gospel in the community and edify the church and then saddle him with the responsibility of rearing the members' children — with a stream of youth activities that should be handled by the parents in the home. Yet, many of these same brethren would balk at the idea of hiring a "youth minister" to head up "youth rallies."

Again, when it comes to rearing your children, "let not the church be charged" (KJV).

Let Christians accept all their individual responsibilities and let not church be burdened. Let the church accept and fulfil its responsibilities, but let it not accept those responsibilities for which it is not charged. Let Christians not blame the church for their failures as individuals.